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## FACTS ABOUT THE WORKING CHILDREN OF CINCINNATI, AND THEIR BEARING UPON EDUCATIONAL PROBLEMS—*Concluded*

HELEN T. WOOLLEY  
Cincinnati, Ohio

### WAGES

(Table VII; Chart VII)

The educational return to the children is, then, a small factor. How about the financial return? Table VII gives the wage statistics for a series of 2,067 children. At the time these statistics were tabulated, half of these children had held but one position, 32.3 per cent had held two, 11 per cent had held three, 2.6 per cent had held four, and 4 per cent had held five or more positions. No account is taken in this table of the length of time the positions had been held.

Almost 40 per cent of the children had taken the first position without even asking what they were to be paid. The wages stated in the table are those promised the children when their contracts were signed. In most cases the office has no assurance about wages except the word of the child, but a long experience has taught us that their statements are surprisingly accurate.

There is a decided sex discrimination from the start. More than eight-tenths of the girls receive less than four dollars a week, while only one-half of the boys are paid less than four dollars. Three dollars is a medium weekly wage for the girls, although more than half of them receive less than that in their first positions. The medium weekly wage for boys is three dollars and seventy-five cents. These sums do not represent average weekly earnings for the year, but merely wages paid at the start in each position. For a limited series of children—474 at the present time—we have a complete industrial history for one year, stating all the rates of pay received, and the time employed. From these facts, an average weekly wage for the year has been figured out for each of

TABLE VII  
WAGES OF CHILDREN UNDER SIXTEEN IN CINCINNATI

	Position I				Position II				Position III				Position IV				Position V			
	Boys		Girls		Boys		Girls		Boys		Girls		Boys		Girls		Boys		Girls	
	Age Percent.	No.	Age Percent.	No.																
Less than \$3.00...	85	12	317	55	27	7	150	40	0.5	46	36	1	1.5	16	35	1	2	11	31.0	
\$3.00-\$3.99....	347	51	108	34	206	49	174	46	72	47.5	63	49	31	46.5	20	13	30	17	49.0	
\$4.00-\$4.99....	193	28	49	8	133	32	42	11	60	40.0	17	13	27	40.0	9	18	42	4	11.5	
\$5.00 and over...	62	9	15	3	50	12	13	3	19	12.0	3	2	8	12.0	1	2	11	26	3	
Total.....	687	100	579	100	416	100	379	100	152	100	129	100	67	100	46	100	43	100	35	
Had not asked...	340	.....	401	.....	166	.....	130	.....	35	.....	50	.....	7	.....	19	.....	3	.....	4	
Total.....	1,027	.....	1,040	.....	522	.....	509	.....	187	.....	179	.....	74	.....	65	.....	46	.....	39	

these children. It is an interesting fact that the medium wage on this basis is also three dollars for girls, and three dollars and seventy-five cents for boys. Apparently the increases in pay balance the time unemployed, and leave the average yearly earning about equal to the initial wage.

Another interesting fact revealed by the table of wage statistics is that the rate of pay increases with mere change of position (Chart VII). The proportion of children in the lower rates of pay decreases with successive changes, and the proportion of those in the higher rates increases. The children have, then, some justification for changing positions. They better themselves financially by doing so. It may still be true that the occupations which hold out the best permanent future are most poorly paid in the early years. The children may be short-sighted in their policy, but one judges their apparent instability less harshly when he knows the immediate profit which it brings them.

#### ECONOMIC NECESSITY AS A FACTOR IN CHILD LABOR

We have seen that the educational value of the work open to children under sixteen is very small. A child does not profit much intellectually, or in manual skill in general, by running errands, basting sleeve seams, or lacing shoes for two years. Small as the wages are, the first supposition is that these children must be going to work because of economic necessity. Before adopting any definite educational policy in the matter, it is essential to know how large a proportion of the families really need the earnings of the children under sixteen. In our own office, we have made the best estimate we could of the economic necessity in a series of over six hundred families. A visit had been made to the home in only half of the cases. Our estimates were based on all the facts we preserved about the family—such as the number of wage earners, their occupations, their earnings, if known, the number of children under fourteen, the rent paid, the number of rooms occupied by the family, the amount of spending money given the child, and the child's own statement of a preference for work or school. The estimates were made separately by more than one person, and the judgments compared. Very doubtful cases were omitted. The

point we tried to decide in each case was whether the family, without the child's earnings, would need outside assistance. The final estimate was that 73 per cent of the families did not need the child's earnings, while 27 per cent did. This estimate, of necessity, is very nearly the same as that made in the government investigation (29.3 per cent),<sup>1</sup> but is a little more than that of Massachusetts towns (24 per cent),<sup>2</sup> or of New York (20 per cent).<sup>3</sup> The only estimate very much higher than this is the one made by Mr. Talbert<sup>4</sup> in the Stockyards district of Chicago (53 per cent), where the conditions are exceedingly bad. Economic necessity is not, then, a compelling force of child labor in the majority of cases.

The real force which is sending the majority of these children out into the industrial field is their own desire to go to work, and behind this desire to go to work is frequently the dissatisfaction with school. The children who tell us that they would have preferred to stay in school are a minority. Most of them are quite frank in saying that they are tired of school and anxious to leave it. The dissatisfaction with school is doubtless in part the restlessness and desire for change, adventure, and independence characteristic of the age of puberty, but perhaps an even more potent factor is the large amount of retardation among working children. Two-thirds of the children leaving our public schools are the failures—and, like the rest of humanity, they are tired of the things in which they fail.

#### APPLICATION TO EDUCATIONAL PROBLEMS

Here are the facts—a large army of children leaving our public schools before they have completed even a grammar-school educa-

<sup>1</sup> *Woman and Child Wage Earners in the United States*, Vol. VII, "Conditions under Which Children Leave School to Go to Work," Washington, 1910; Senate Document No. 645, p. 57.

<sup>2</sup> *Report of the Commission on Industrial and Technical Education* (Massachusetts), Columbia University, Teachers College; *Educational Reprints*, No. I, New York, 1906, p. 92.

<sup>3</sup> Barrows, Alice P., "Report of the Vocational Guidance Survey," *Bulletin No. 9, Public Education Association*, New York, 1912.

<sup>4</sup> Talbert, Ernest L., *Opportunities in School and Industry for Children of the Stockyards District* (University of Chicago Press, 1912, p. 39).

tion—leaving, not because they must, but because they wish to—entering occupations which do not aid in their development—receiving wages so small that they would not furnish the barest necessities of life. Shall we allow it to go on?

Suppose we agree, for a moment, that the state of affairs ought

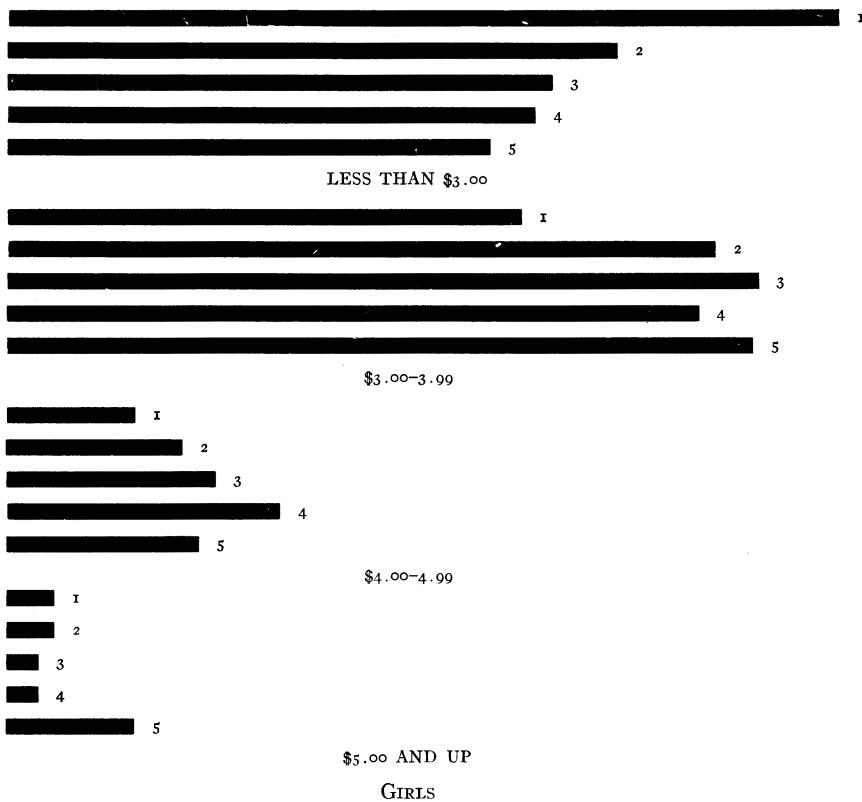
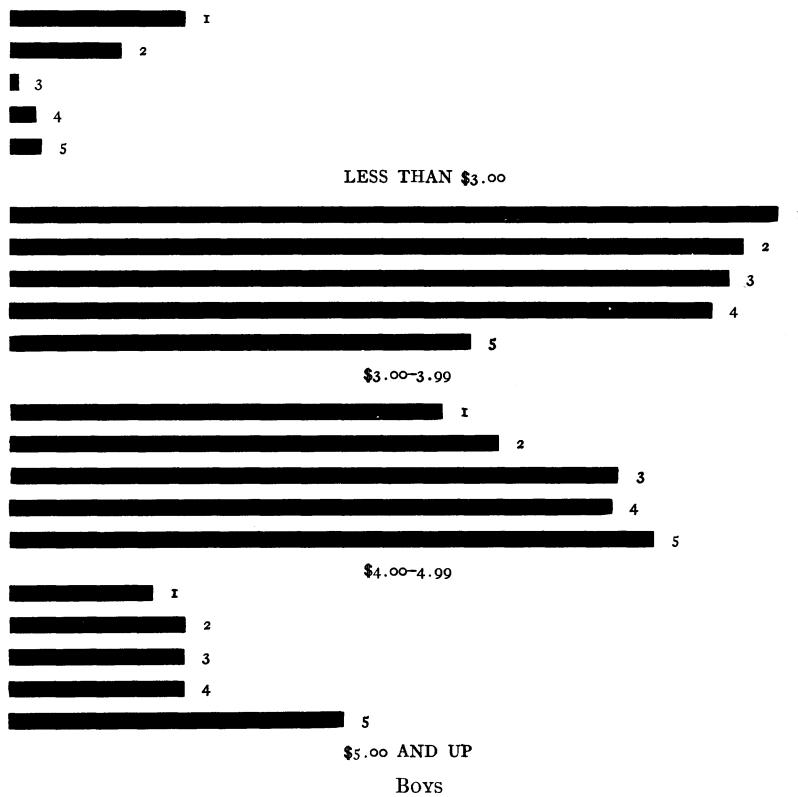


CHART VII—WAGES

not to continue, and consider what ought to be done about it. It is hopeless at present to expect industry to modify the conditions of employment sufficiently to insure educational work to children. The problem must be attacked by the schools, if at all. Until recently, the public schools have felt that their responsibility ended when the children who were not capable of succeeding were simply

dropped from the rolls, but they are beginning to feel that turning out every year an army of children who have merely failed, and have not been helped to find out in what direction, if at all, they might succeed, cannot be regarded as satisfactory educational work. The most obvious suggestion for a remedy is to raise the age require-

CHART VII—WAGES—*Continued*

ment to sixteen years, when the openings for children in industry are more advantageous. But to force children, who have already failed, to endure two more years of a kind of training for which they have shown themselves unfitted, seems barbaric.

The problem cannot be really met by the schools until they provide a different type of training—a type of training which would

make possible an appeal to the children's desire to work with their hands, and to their longing for economic independence. Those who feel most intensely the necessity for such a modification of the school curriculum are tempted to urge an immediate increase of the age requirement to sixteen years, because it would bring the schools at once face to face with the imperative necessity for providing a more nearly adequate kind of education for those who are failing in the present academic régime.

But the recognition of the need of the children for more vocational education is only the first step in the complex problem before us. For what occupations in particular shall the schools undertake to prepare children? It is safe to say that not one of the trades or occupations on our list, as it is at present conducted, offers enough in educational and financial return to the children to warrant the public school in training them for it. It ought to be laid down as a basic principle in devising any system of industrial education, that the state will never take over the preparation of workers for a specific trade until that trade can show that it offers its employees a chance for *physical* and *mental* development, and a fair financial return for their labor.

It seems the part of wisdom, then, for the public schools to go very slowly in the matter of establishing courses of training designed to prepare young children—even as young as sixteen—for specific industries. As industry itself becomes more socialized, and the welfare of the individual worker becomes a matter of much greater concern to it than at present, it may be safe for the schools to take over the preparation of workers for a larger number of industries. Indeed the schools may have a very powerful influence in hastening the development of this more social spirit in industry, provided they make the training of workers for any craft depend directly upon the conditions of employment, and the educational and financial returns of the craft itself.

But even though specific trade training for the younger group of working children seems inadvisable at present, it does not follow that there is nothing the schools can do at once to assist them. We have seen that most of the children who are leaving the schools are those who do not succeed with work in which the stress falls—

as it does in our present system of instruction—on the purely intellectual method of presentation. If they are to succeed at all, it must be in some calling where work with the hands is of paramount importance. If the schools could lay more stress from the start on training manual dexterity of various kinds, and through many media, children of the class who leave the schools early—and perhaps the others also—would be the gainers in many ways. Not only would the mere possession of greater manual dexterity be an asset in industrial work and indeed in most pursuits in life, but the process of trying various kinds of occupations would be the most effectual way of helping a child decide for what type of work he is best fitted. Then, too, many children who are now failing in the schools, fail not so much because they lack mental ability, as because the kind of instruction offered does not succeed in stimulating their intellectual processes. Experiment has shown that many of these same children can be held in school, and that they can do the theoretical part of the school work, when their interest is maintained by making some sort of constructive work with the hands, a central feature in instruction.

In addition to general training in manual dexterity and the use of tools, the children who are to enter industry early would be much better equipped if they received elementary instruction in industrial history, social and industrial legislation, and simple business methods. There seems no good reason why a child should leave the public schools without knowing what the provisions of the child labor law are, or with so little idea of business method that he takes his first position—as 40 per cent of our children do—without even asking what he is to be paid.

One is often asked what is the use of providing better training of any sort for children who enter industry early, so long as the jobs remain the same. Perhaps there would be little use in it, if the jobs were sure to remain the same, but it seems a reasonable hope that more skilful and more intelligent workers may improve, faster than any other agency, conditions of industry.